

*The Inquisitive Mind: Science and Imagination*: Heritage items from the collections of the National Museum, Bloemfontein in collaboration with South African contemporary artists. Group exhibition curated by Yolanda de Kock in 2014.

With *The Inquisitive Mind: Science and Imagination* -exhibition, various celebrated scientists and historians from the National Museum Bloemfontein were challenged to put their research once more under the lens of the microscope. This time their investigations and results were observed through the eyes of the artist, using their research as inspiration to create an artwork. This exhibition questions and answers the art of science or perhaps the science of art? Visual vocabularies were created by the artists about specimens often overlooked or uncared for. New perspectives were given to recorded histories, unravelled and observed by the artist, to formulate open ended questions for the viewer to comprehend, appreciate or to dissent.

*The Inquisitive Mind: Science and Imagination* was a visual feast of collected heritage items from the collections of the National Museum, Bloemfontein presented in collaboration with South African contemporary artists. Participating artists include Elrie Joubert, Dot Vermeulen, Barbara Wildenboer, Ben Botma, Janine Allen-Spies, Jaco Spies, Willem Boshoff and Carl Becker.

The idea of having an annual exhibition to specifically showcase an aspect (or aspects of) Oliewenhuis Art Museum's mission was first conceived a few years ago.

This year Oliewenhuis Art Museum (a satellite of the National Museum, Bloemfontein) decided to 'pair' various departments of the National Museum with contemporary South African artists to realize collaboration between these departments and to create awareness of the work done at the National Museum in its entirety.

Palaeoenvironmental studies: Dr Lloyd Rossouw and Janine Allen.

Lloyd Rossouw:

Phytoliths

Phytoliths are useful for palaeoenvironmental studies, including reconstructing past environments because they are inorganic, resistant to oxidation (and associated deterioration) and can be found in a variety of fossil sedimentary contexts.

The term 'phytolith' is a general description for soluble, hydrated silica that is deposited within a variety of plant types. Plants absorb the silica dissolved in the soil, along with nutrients, through their root system. The silica solidifies in the plant tissues, either within or outside of cells, adopting different sizes and shapes, depending on the tissue and the plant. Grasses produce abundant phytoliths, especially within specific and specialized silica cells located in the leaf epidermis. Phytoliths generally include both typical silica bodies formed in specialized silica cells as well as uncharacteristic silica bodies sometimes present in other epidermal cells of living plants. In addition to being highly resistant to decomposition, grass phytoliths show markedly varied and distinct forms and shapes and several morphological studies have indicated that a number of forms of grass phytoliths are characteristic of certain groups of grasses.

The size of grass phytoliths generally ranges from 5 to 30 microns (1 micron = one thousandth of a millimeter). Phytoliths are studied using a polarizing light microscope at 400x and 1000x magnification.

Janine Allen (the brusher)

The far sides (2014), interactive work consisting of two pieces, pencil, magnets, Perspex and paper, 58 x 82,5cm & 59,5 X 84,5 cm

Paleo-environmentalism is the research of ancient environments to estimate earth's environmental cycles over an expanse of a million years or more. A central aspect of paleo-environmentalism is how living creatures are the processing media of these environments. A paleo-environmentalist may detect stable silica that keeps the ancient environmental structures existing in animals' teeth, grass or soil specimens. Silica carries clues of the earth's environment even a million years ago. *Paleo* means ancient or far away time. How does the artist whose current concerns are with the destructive components of today's technologically-orientated world integrate such a reconstruction of past environments and its influence on future earth? Lloyd's paleontological projects give a unique opportunity to contemplate on time past, and time future or what I call 'the far sides'. Time, as perceived by the philosopher Herman Nietzsche, is not just a circle or a feedback loop where past and future meet. He saw the moment as a split-path (Ger. *scheidewege*) where time is the prospecting source of meaning. Time is not just a form and the moment is not just a point in time. But time is a fruitful moment. To elaborate on Nietzsche's thought, time is the prospective content, as the form of an artwork is the content prospected by viewers. My drawing is an alternative time map prospecting abundant moments. In the fertile moments when engaging with the time map, the 'far sides' meet in the intimate moments. The paleo-environmentalist, the brusher and the viewers participate in these moments, with the purpose to contemplate on time, not as a distant thing or a mechanical measurement, but a property in us. The soil, teeth and the grass transporters of the tell-tale silica give us some indication of a deeper understanding of time. When we look at space and we see Mars' dust storms, we look into the past, but we often perceive such happenings as future space. On the contrary, the more I reflect on Lloyd's research and images, the less I see the past and the more I become aware of earth's future and the role humans may or may not play. Yet I anticipated such a 'time warping' experience, but could only somewhat grasp time's manifestation after I studied Lloyd's films and Internet images of unidentified objects in space. The paleo-environmentalist may have a similar experience when he looks daily at the magnified properties through a microscope. In this artwork, viewers can move magnetic circles into unforeseen constellations, reminiscing on petri dishes, electromagnetic microscopes, the glass caps of empty watches, the play of wind-blown grass, dust storms or the dancing of UFO's, etc, etc. Each person may re-energise their concept of time and become co-artists or co-paleo-environmentalists. The conspiracy act between the imaginary and the scientific protects the human race of feedback loops consisting of infertile time diminishing into nothing.